

Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

Part B: The Beginnings of Ancient Israel's Literature among the Syro-Palestinian City-States before the Advent of the Assyrians (Tenth-Eighth Centuries BCE)

Given the methodological presuppositions explained in Part A, what texts or fragmentary texts can legitimately be understood to stem from the 10th- 8th centuries BCE? Given the paucity of the data, very little- and consequently this is a relatively short chapter.

The cultural contexts that form the background for the beginnings of ancient Israel's literature are thus more modest than what is projected by the Bible... (p. 50).

Moreover

...Israel in the tenth century BCE was at least a century, Judah a good two centuries, from achieving a degree of statehood that would begin to make an *extensive* literary production impossible on the basis of its associated cultural-contextual status (p. 51).

However, this should lull no one into a false sense that there isn't indeed material which can – with relative certainty – be traced back to those hoary days of yore. For instance

... the literary beginnings of the Jacob traditions were handed on and cultivated at Bethel in the pre-Assyrian period (p. 53).

Some will doubtless find this a rather bold claim- but Schmid has done his homework and he doesn't simply state his case, he supports it with cogent and in many respects convincing evidence.

Additionally

... Solomon's speech at the dedication of the temple- handed down outside the Psalter- can be reconstructed from 1 Kgs 8:12-13. It should be located in the pre-Assyrian period... (p. 55).

You're right if you've assumed that Schmid understands both David and Solomon to be historical figures. So if his work has a weakness, it's this: that the Bible is the primary source for the reconstruction of the biblical 'timeline' concerning the composition of the Bible. This is, it has to be confessed, simply the way things are. To leave the Bible aside in discussions of the composition history of the Bible is to have no material at all to

discuss! We just don't have anything substantive outside the Bible aside from snippets and fragments and they don't provide sufficient material for comparison.

But Schmid is too smart to insist that the Bible's telling of the David/Solomon story is contemporaneous with the events it narrates. It isn't. Neither are many of the other events set in the 10th-8th centuries BCE. At best

We may think, for example, of lists like those in Joshua 18-19 for Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar, and perhaps Asher, which may have come from the time of Jeroboam II (p. 58).

Nevertheless

... the patriarchal stories in Genesis retain a prominent block of narratives from the Northern Kingdom... However, the North Israelite Jacob cycle may owe its literary survival primarily to the later redactional connection to the Abraham and Isaac traditions from Judah (p. 58-59).

Schmid sums up at the conclusion of the chapter by means of an illustration from the world of archaeology:

In any case, there can scarcely be any doubt that the David narratives... have preserved contemporary recollections. A particularly obvious example is found in the story about David's service to the Philistine king Achish of Gath... Gath was destroyed around the end of the ninth century BCE. Without a corresponding historical recollection, which in this case can be dated with sufficient certainty, this motif would scarcely have found its way into the tradition (p. 63).

Fair enough. Small fragments of historical memories have been worked into larger narratives at a later date. I'm not sure anyone would disagree with that. Or at least, no one should disagree with it. The debate comes when the extent of that historical tradition is the subject.

Schmid's work in Part B is exceptional. The volume is proving itself very useful and very intriguing. On to Part C next.

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